

ARNOLD BENNETT



ARNOLD BENNETT.

From a painting by Edward Wolfe.

ARNOLD BENNETT

BY

MRS. ARNOLD BENNETT



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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

ARNOLD BENNETT's characteristics as an artist and as a man are being described almost daily to satisfy public curiosity and interest. As his wife I wish (with risk of censure) to try to readjust so many diverse opinions, and to add my own impressions to those of others. There are confidences that must be respected; I have respected them. A wife cannot be absolutely impartial, but she may succeed in writing about her husband, whether in praise or in criticism, without any exaggeration. I hope I have succeeded in presenting to readers both Arnold Bennett the artist, whom the public admires, and Arnold Bennett the man, whose intelligence and charm attract and retain his friends.

MARGUERITE BENNETT.

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EXTRACT FROM *WHO'S WHO*

BENNETT, ENOCH ARNOLD, author and journalist; b. North Staffordshire, 27 May 1867; married. Educ. Newcastle Middle School. Abandoned the law in 1893 to become assistant editor of *Woman*; succeeded to editorship in December 1896; resigned 1900 to devote himself exclusively to literature.

THE FIRST MEETING

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST MEETING

I.

SHALL I ever forget the day I met him ? It was in Paris, in the winter of 1906. He was nearly forty then. He had been living in Paris for about seven years, and had made many friends among French people. Amongst them were Maurice Ravel, the composer ; Ricardo Viñes, the pianist ; Calvocoressi, the musical critic and lecturer ; Pierre Bonnard, the painter ; Marcel Schwob, the writer, and many other well-known men. He also had many English and American friends either living in Paris or *de passage*. Most of them were women whose acquaintance he had made

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in London while he was sub-editor of a women's magazine in which articles were signed by women's names only, including articles which he himself wrote and signed Ida, Rose, Jane, Edith, Dorothy, or whatever it might be. In those days, no doubt, he exercised his peculiar fascination on the sex. Women had already taught him "a thing or two," as they say in the Five Towns. The public was already having the benefit of this knowledge, and I was to be affected by the fascination which he had and still has for women, and which all men interested in women possess.

I was introduced to him by a mutual friend. I had long before heard of him in the circle in which I was moving, and I had also heard of his work. I am not ashamed to say that I had read nothing of his, though he had published eight novels, innumerable short stories, a few books of essays and some

THE FIRST MEETING

short plays. When I had inquired about him, I had been told that he was above all a *bon chroniqueur*, a good journalist. It was therefore a good journalist I was to meet. A good journalist was not, in those days, an alarming creature to me. And yet I was afraid of finding him with the characteristics of an Englishman—a quiet, cold, sarcastic, condescending Englishman of the intellectual type. I had pictured him as a man strangely dressed, a man perhaps with a beard *à la Edouard VII*, and perhaps also with a figure on the fat side; and in my mind an Englishman, a journalist who had left his country for so long and made his home in Paris, could only be a strange man—an eccentric who had gradually merged his British manners and customs in those of his new surroundings. Strange! His home I had not inquired about. I had only been told that he loved comfort, that one of his great pleasures was

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to have friends to tea ; that he had the habit of lunching, always alone, in a Montmartre restaurant, and that he never dined alone. He lived then in the quiet and aristocratic rue d'Aumale in Montmartre, on the first floor of a *maison de rapport* guarded by a *concierge*.

The afternoon I called, a French maid opened the door of his flat, and I found myself in a small hall, rather dark but happily made brighter with the help of a large looking-glass above the table. The maid looked rather austere ; the hall certainly was. The drawing-room, with its three windows and its shining polished floor, was beautifully furnished and very handsome. By the mantelpiece stood a tall, slim, elegant Englishman with grey hair, looking extremely distinguished in a dark blue suit which suited his fair complexion divinely. That man was Enoch Arnold Bennett. He welcomed me with a

firm handshake and such a charming smile that at first sight I did not pay attention to his most interesting head. I first noticed his hands. They were extremely white and *soignées*. Their shape was fine. The hand of an artist, and of a man who valued the precious gift Heaven had offered him, and who knew how to take good care of that gift. That hand was the loud-speaking voice of the quality in the man. It compensated for his possible shortcomings, revealed by the shape of the jaw, the prominent teeth, the curve of the lower lip. But the hand was not the only witness to his finer qualities ; I noted the purity of the forehead, the kindness of the eyes, the boyishness of the smile, the determination, the inquisitiveness and the sharpness of the nose.

There was only one thing that neither the beautiful hand nor the head could account for. It was the pale, colourless voice of the

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man—a voice intolerable to me had it come from anyone else. But when his voice said “ Do sit down ! ” his charm had already acted on me in spite of that colourless voice. I enjoyed the straight-backed Empire chair while he sat on a comfortable sofa of the same period. From the drawing-room, handsomely furnished in the same style, I could see his study, of which the door leading into the drawing-room was wide open. The study also was furnished in the Empire style. “ This is the right atmosphere for me,” I thought. “ I love being here ! ” I enjoyed looking at the whole effect of the room—its richness and distinctiveness. I felt that I had never known before what a well-furnished room was like, and I was deeply impressed. It was obvious that the man was proud of his home and pleased with himself as a host. That he was studying me I had no doubt, but I was not conscious of it.

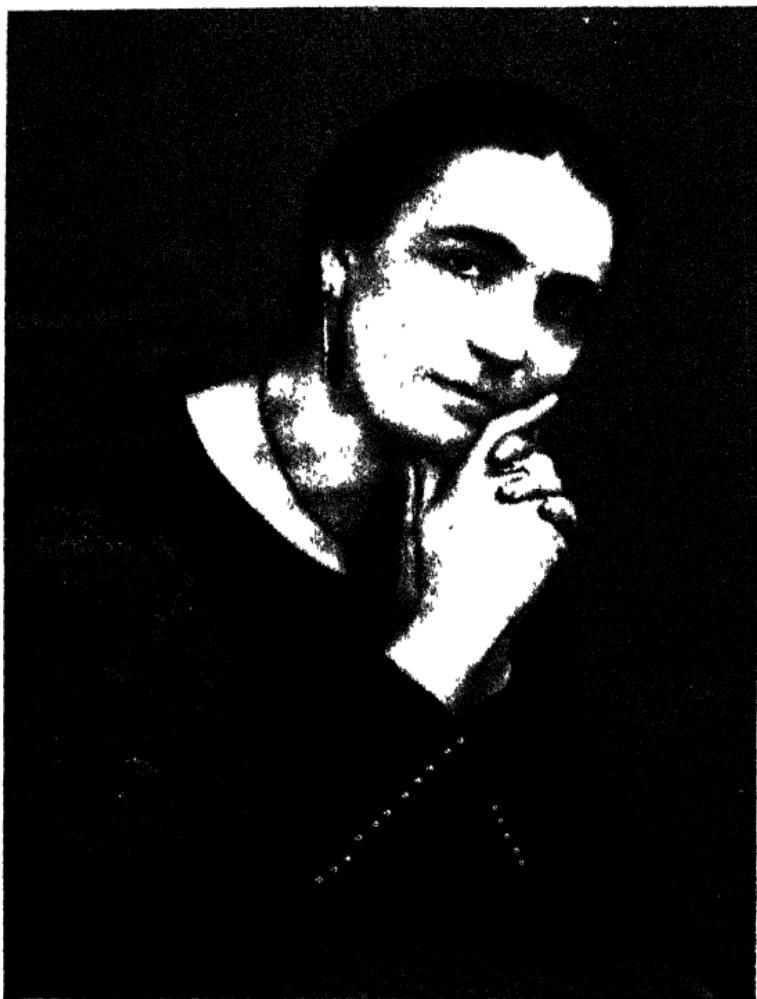


Photo by]

MRS. ARNOLD BENNETT.

[Malcolm Arbuthnot,

THE FIRST MEETING

We had tea, we talked about Paris, plays, books. I was impressed by his remarks, his ideas, his knowledge of French literature. In the conversation I told him frankly that I had not read a line of his work. "I am not surprised," he answered, and waving his hand, he said, "There is a good book of mine which has been published lately. You will like it. I will let you have a copy to read." The book was "Leonora." I knew at once that I would read the book—that I could not escape reading that book in spite of the trouble it would give me to master a language which was not my mother-tongue. When I left him I was aware that I had met a most powerful personality.

II.

I walked home thrilled. I was in those days living alone. My home was small and badly furnished with things I had inherited.

I had made the best of them. I was proud of the simplicity and tidiness of my home. One of the virtues of a Parisienne is that she knows how to make the best of things, both in her home and in the adornment of herself. If she is poor, she hides her poverty without being ashamed of it. To her, poverty is a stimulant towards success, in cooking a meal or making her clothes or in getting on in life. These qualities, together with her personal charm, are often the principal part of her dowry. It takes, of course, a clever man to appreciate these qualities. But such men exist, and many a rich man would rather marry a clever, capable Parisienne with a small dowry or no dowry at all than a provincial girl with a large dowry and even large expectations. The Parisienne makes money go a long way. The Parisienne is a good pupil, for she has a quick brain and can adapt herself. If nicely brought up, and if

THE FIRST MEETING

born with artistic feelings and a kind nature, she is proclaimed as one of the best companions that a man can possibly have. The Parisienne as a rule is well aware of her own value, which in itself is a palpable proof of her common sense. Even if she is somewhat of a realist (as she most decidedly is), she is dying for romance as well as other women whom life has not treated too badly when they first believed in romance. Arnold Bennett, the Englishman I had just met, struck me as being a man capable of appreciating a Parisienne at her true value.

Curiously enough, entering my home after leaving his, I felt ashamed. Everything in it looked so ugly, so insignificant, so uncomfortable. There was no harmony. It had never struck me before. Now it was staring me in the face. "Something will have to be done," I thought. How could I have lived among all these ugly things—how could

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I? My eyes were opened all of a sudden to the reality of my surroundings. Not only was there little harmony, there was none at all. Near an Empire easy-chair I could see one of wicker. I had too many photographs about. Even a cup and saucer left on the table. I wished that I could burn the whole lot and start afresh, but that would have been an impossibility—it could not have been done without a lot of money, of which I had but little. Satisfied with my own home I no longer could be; it was dreadful. Yet truth had to be faced. My eyes had suddenly been opened to beauty. The personality of the Englishman I had just met had accomplished this miracle. And yet he had said little, explained nothing. This crisis was the first real step towards my artistic development. I knew it. A sudden desire to know life better took hold of me. Undeveloped is what I was. I realised that my intellectual life

THE FIRST MEETING

was ineffectual, that all my reading had been done carelessly, that my studies had been carried on without order or method. I was specialising in dramatic art, and my studies had been badly directed. Everything must be rebuilt for me, for everything looked wrong. Determination crept into my soul as never before. I made up my mind to work hard, to do anything in order to become a well-known dramatic artiste, the ambition of all my life. Hitherto all my efforts in that direction had been diffident; they could no longer be so now. Something glorious which I could not quite define, but which I felt, had at last happened to me—something which would change my whole life. The Englishman I had just met would encourage me and help me as never before had I been encouraged or helped. He would understand me, guide me. Fate had sent him to me. Was he aware at all of the emotion he had

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created in me? I could not help wondering. But that night, instead of beginning to read "Leonora," the book he had lent me, I learned by heart one of Paul Verlaine's beautiful poems—a poem of exultation and hope and love :

Puisque l'aube grandit, puisque voici l'aurore,
Puisque après m'avoir fui longtemps, l'espoir
veut bien
Revoler devers moi, qui l'appelle et l'implore,
Puisque, tout ce bonheur veut bien être le
mien . . .
C'en est fait maintenant des funcstes pensées
C'en est fait des mauvais rêves. . . .

Next day I recited that poem to the teacher of elocution with whom I was working. Poetry I always loved. Verse I always preferred to prose. Recitation I always preferred to acting—one is one's own master with poetry when once the art of recitation has been mastered. Did my new friend Arnold

THE FIRST MEETING

Bennett suspect this weakness of mine? Had he noticed my meditative nature which hid a craving for perfection in human nature, a craving for spiritual and material peace, a love of beautiful thoughts and beautiful deeds, which was all intensified by my religious upbringing? I thought that the next time we should meet—for I felt that we could but meet again—he would have to know.

The opportunity was given to me. A few days later we dined together. Later on, not only did he give me the chance to speak about myself, my ambitions, but he encouraged me in my work. He once gave an evening in his flat at which French poets, composers and artists were present. I recited a few poems, most of which at the time were ultra modern, the work of Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Albert Samain, Mallarmé. This was a triumph for me.

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My shyness and nervousness had been intense, but my sincerity had been appreciated by men of value. I felt that I had at last *le pied à l'étrier*. Soon after, however, fate directed me into another path. I gave up the hope of a dramatic career, for which I thought I had been created, to become the wife of the man I loved, and to whom I thought I should be a helpful and understanding companion for life.

NEW ELEMENTS

CHAPTER II

NEW ELEMENTS

MARRIAGE makes but little difference in the life of a born and confirmed bachelor of forty who has always taken life seriously, has formed habits, has known how to manage a home, how to keep a servant whose time he has known how to organise ; who has had an aim in life—the aim to succeed as a public man ; and has carried in his heart the secret of his beloved ambition—to be one of the greatest writers of his age ; which ambition he nurses, cherishes and places above everything else. But marriage provides for such a bachelor a sympathetic friend, a companion, and an element of femininity which may

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have a direct or indirect influence on his work—a soothing or charming or disturbing element, which adds to the familiar surroundings and habits something new to observe, some new material to exploit, a new experience. A newly married woman is interesting to the artist, the man who studies life, the writer; and how thrilling it must be when that newly married woman is his own wife! Look at her! For him she will (if necessary) get up early, make his early cup of tea, hurry in the bathroom in order that the master of the house shall not wait a second for his bath; see that breakfast is served in time, cook it herself while her only maid gets the study (the sanctuary of the house) ready for him to enter directly breakfast is over. She is the one who sits at the other end of the dining-room table, taking her breakfast quietly while her husband is having his, reading half-a-dozen newspapers; the one he will not see

again until the luncheon-hour, though he is in the house the whole time ; the one who, after lunch, will keep the house quiet while the master, tired after his morning's work, retires to his bedroom to rest ; the one who is allowed after lunch to see him in that bedroom, and to see that he is lying down comfortably with a hot-water bottle and a rug to keep him warm, even when the weather is hot ; the one who understands that her writer husband, using so much mental energy, has to be kept warm, well-fed, well-looked-after in every way ; the one who shows kindness, attention ; the one to whom orders are not given, and yet whose sensibility helps her to understand and to obey a tremendous personality which commands without saying anything, receives with an occasional expression of gratitude, gives little in return but means well, and expects that one shall find in his good intentions or indifference the mark

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of his devotion ; the one who *does* understand his attitude as well as the baby in him, which baby she adores, cherishes and spoils ; the one whose patience is tried every minute by well-meaning remarks, but too often tactless remarks—unnecessary remarks ; the one who has tea with you, but understands that after tea you want to be alone, either in your study or out for a walk or elsewhere ; the one who dresses for dinner (even though she has to look after the dinner herself) because she knows that you love dresses and good cooking ; the one who in evening attire is capable of showing a bad cook how to make a good omelet ; the one who lives for you, your work and your welfare, and who when bedtime comes will say, seeing that you are tired, “Darling, you have had a long day’s work ; you need rest if you want to be able to do as much to-morrow as you have done to-day. Sleep well ! ” All interesting, thrill-

N E W E L E M E N T S

ing, romantic to the confirmed bachelor writer just married !

No housekeeper who is housekeeper only could compete with that newly married woman, your wife.

CHAPTER III

HIS SURROUNDINGS

THERE are two distinct categories of artist—the tidy and the untidy, the bohemian and the bourgeois.

To the artist born a bohemian, material life counts but little, except in crises when he is apt to indulge himself. This artist little worries about good meals, a good bed, regular hours for his work, and requirements of his physical organism. His body on the whole seems to be of no importance to him. He thinks above all about his soul which, together with his intellect, was given him to use when moods of inspiration bring out the power which lies within him and which is called

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genius. Through his genius he creates a work of art, a masterpiece which, after moving him, will move mankind for generation after generation to come. When making his choice, the bohemian artist prefers to a tidy room for his work an untidy one, in which he feels that he can move freely, act freely. Harmony matters to him in his creative work only. In this he expresses his beautiful thoughts, his love of truth, his love of beauty, his comprehension of beauty, his sense of order. All his attention is concentrated on his work ; his surroundings matter little. Tidiness round him might even upset him without his realising it. *Le désordre est un effet de l'art* was very likely the remark of an untidy bohemian artist.

Arnold Bennett can only work freely in tidy surroundings, for he belongs to the category of the bourgeois artist. Nothing annoys him so much as untidiness, carelessness.

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When young he was taught that tidiness and order save time and money. Good habits, regular habits, he was made to adopt. I am inclined to think that with his methodical mind it was easy to train him to be careful, punctual, exacting with himself and others. His inborn sense of order and discipline undoubtedly developed his sense of observation. At an early age he could tell which of two chairs—one artistic, one with indifferent lines—was the more beautiful. He could tell you also, at a glance, where in a room was the best place for a piece of furniture for either practical or decorative purposes.

At the age of twenty-one, when he left his provincial town for London, his education in these matters was so advanced that at first he thought London could teach him nothing. But his desire to go on educating himself in practical, material and artistic spheres brought him into contact with those

HIS SURROUNDINGS

whose taste and wealth could provide him with the means of studying every sort of artistic beauty and worldly luxury. He became (after being a solicitor's clerk for years) sub-editor of a magazine whose aim was to teach the public the best way to make the best of everything. He had for years to read or write articles for that paper on how to furnish a room, how to cook a dinner, how to serve a dinner, how to make tea, how to become a professional housekeeper, how to dress beautifully, how to buy books. Such an experience developed in him his natural need for comfort, his natural taste for beautiful things, beautifully made or created, from shoes to women.

The surroundings he had created for himself were now to be mine. I had to take care of his home. To share a home with such a well-informed and practical husband was a privilege, but a somewhat terrifying prospect,

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although the surroundings appealed so much to my natural instincts and taste.

I felt that there was no possible way for me to learn through my own experience the best place in a room for a picture or a piece of furniture. Like a naughty child, I would rebel at times, and would change the position of the furniture, secretly thinking it might even improve the room. But alas ! every time I tried such a daring experiment I had to admit to myself that the place first chosen by Arnold Bennett was the only possible place. Each time I felt a little humiliated, but congratulated myself upon having an infallible husband who could teach me so much. However, I could not help showing my own personality in the choice of cushions, vases for flowers, linen, and above all, in the choice of my dresses, which were always chosen without the help of my most critical, exacting connoisseur husband. I had become



ARNOLD BENNETT'S BEDROOM AT COMMARQUES, THORPE-LE-SOKEN.

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a part of his surroundings, and fortunately my attire did not disturb the homogeneity of his home.

I was not long in realising that nothing is more disturbing to some minds than a change of habits and surroundings. I could understand when new curtains in a room would distract attention and spoil the beginning, the middle or the end of a chapter. A sensitive artist has to be prompted about such changes ! Arnold Bennett disliked any change of that description. Once he has surrounded himself with things which he considers beautiful, practical and convenient, once he has grouped them harmoniously according to his own idea of harmony, his creation must be left alone till he leaves the place for good. He could not possibly work if things around him were not in their permanent places. His wife or his servants, having the honour of seeing after his rooms, turning out his rooms

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must make sure of replacing everything in its proper position and not an inch from the place in which he originally put it; for it is a crime not to do so! There is no such thing as deceiving the master on either vital or insignificant things—he cannot be deceived. He knows and notices everything, for nothing escapes his sharpness.

I do not mean to say that all tidy artists are so exacting as my writer husband. As a matter of fact, few can be to such a degree. To live with a tidy, careful, methodical man is to become in time as tidy and exacting as he is himself. Such an atmosphere brings real peace of mind and tranquillity, even when it is achieved by sacrificing the fancifulness, keenness and inventiveness which might add charm to the management of a house.

W O R K A N D R U L E S

CHAPTER IV

WORK AND RULES

ARNOLD BENNETT has always known how to make the best of his twenty-four hours a day. No human machine has ever worked more efficiently or at a more regular speed—one gear for work, one for play—as his human machine has done for over thirty-seven years without a serious break.

When we were engaged, I knew that he worked hard, that he could write a novel in two months, but my knowledge ended there. I respected the mystery in which he seemed to envelop himself. It was only when we were married that I realised what a conscientious writer he was—absolutely in love with his work. He lived for his work, put it

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before everything and everybody, even his own welfare. To a man like him it could not very well be otherwise, for apart from the fact that work, and work alone, is the only thing which brings to many people satisfaction and happiness, he is a creative artist with business instincts, who wishes to succeed in the full sense of the word. His work *had* to count first.

Hard as it is for an artist's wife to have but second place in her husband's heart, soul and life, she *must* realise it, and the sooner she does so the better. Once she has admitted this obvious fact, she can and will sympathise better than ever with her artist husband, who has to go through great trials, who is the slave of his intellectual work. She will help him by giving in to him in most things, finding her own reward in the fact that she is able to do so. She will understand that if, after his work, he wants

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amusement, diversion and fresh people around him, he also needs more than any other human being a constant, firm, feminine affection—hers. She will train herself to find out the secret reasons of his apparent or real neglect of her. She will make allowances for him for the sake of himself and his work, for she knows that he expects her to understand him; that he married her because she understood him and his work. She will make up her mind to be his faithful friend and companion for life. She will not forget that he is a good judge of character, and that in choosing her he cannot have made a mistake. To her he went for affection; her affection he expects to have always, and whatever happens. He knows that nothing is permanent, yet he makes an exception of affection, which he believes can last a lifetime.

Arnold Bennett, being a philosopher, does

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not expect from human nature more than human nature can give, any more than he is capable of losing himself completely in love or of being completely absorbed by love. He has a well-balanced mind, and takes from life what life has to offer. He takes human nature into consideration, and makes allowance for its shortcomings.

His work is the centre of his life and his chief interest. He regards himself as a machine which has to produce book after book, play after play, to amuse, interest or educate others. He loves, nurses and thinks about this machine more than anything else; consequently he is self-centred, and occasionally extremely egotistic, like most of us; but he has moods of extreme kindness, and is capable of deep and lasting affection. No one appreciates love, affection, devotion more than he does, for the man and the artist in him call for love, affection and devotion.

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At heart an artist is a greater child than any other man. Like a child, he loves to be appreciated, flattered, encouraged and occasionally bullied ; but if he does appreciate devotion, he is also inclined to undervalue it. To him devotion carried too far and demonstrated too much does not command respect ; at the bottom of his heart he rather despises it.

Being himself, by his mere qualification and attitude of mind, somewhat of a tyrant, he values the courageous one who, knowing him, does not fear him, but tells him sometimes the plain truth about himself ; the one who, while sympathising with his shortcomings, does not approve of them, but tries to help him to improve himself, as he himself tries through his art to improve mankind. Truth stimulates ; devotion might become very tedious and dull, and dullness is a disease which might kill the most active artist mind. The artist has to be kept interested at whatever

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cost if he is to work. Many artists do not suspect the efforts, the sacrifices, made by those who love them in order to keep them alive, happy, interested and interesting.

In common with many other writers, Arnold Bennett always carries a notebook—usually a Walker's loose-leaf book—in his pocket. As he is a methodical man, you will find his notebook always in the same pocket of whatever suit he is wearing; and you will always find that book night after night on the table near his bed when he accomplishes the act common to us all of undressing for bed. The man takes that book out of his pocket with an expressive gesture which does not vary—a gesture of lassitude. It is very natural that he should make such a gesture when retiring after a full and busy day. This gesture of lassitude does not always mean, "By George, I am glad the day's work is over . . . it had to be done . . . and

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I have done it!" Very often it means, "When I think that I have to go on to-morrow with this terrible, endless, straining brain-work, I hate and confound my profession—I wish I were a business man and a business man only!" But the man who wishes he were nothing but a business man, gets into bed, takes a classic or a newly published book, and before going to sleep continues stimulating his subconscious mind; and next morning faces his task bravely, almost amorously.

He himself has laid down the laws for his day, which laws he will not and never does transgress. One of the laws he has laid down for himself is to write in the morning from the notes taken the day before. But the fundamental and most important law which he first obeys is to make himself his early cup of tea, usually about seven o'clock. It is easy to imagine a man, who has proved to

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his public that he knows how to make tea, making his own early cup of tea in a most perfect manner, which manner he has many times described. It sounds rather hard that a man of his *timbre*, with people at his disposal (a lady secretary and many servants), has to make his own tea. But this is his choice, though naturally one tries to spare him, the master of the house, as much trouble as possible. Every night a tray containing a spirit lamp, matches, teapot, cup and saucer and spoon, is put into his bedroom, tea and sugar being kept in an antique tea-caddy in the room. This early cup of tea made and taken, the writer begins his day's work by reading in bed until it is time for him to have his bath, dress and get ready for breakfast served at nine o'clock. It is also part of the day's work to read newspapers at breakfast; part of the day's work to smoke a cigarette after breakfast, whilst concentrating

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his mind before seating himself at the sacred writing-desk in order to proceed with a novel, or whatever work he is engaged on. If he feels that concentration is hard to obtain, or that the precious notebook does not contain enough material for a whole morning's work, the man gets ready to go out, does go out, and returns to his study some half-hour or two hours later and writes until lunch-time. After lunch, time has to be found for him to rest. Time is always found. His brain must rest: it is in the day's programme. His conscience must have peace, and peace it cannot have if he has transgressed one of his most sacred laws, "Thou shalt always rest in the afternoon." With conscience disturbed, work would suffer, and disaster might follow.

We know that the man lives for his work. Whatever form it takes, work is always thrilling to him. One is thrilled reading

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what he has created. His creation made out of an impulse or a series of impulses is put down on paper quietly, regularly, methodically; day after day, year after year, from the first of January to the thirty-first of December; every morning, sometimes in the afternoon as well, but never at night. One has only to glance at the long list of his works to realise what can be accomplished by a man who has a programme and sticks to it all his life. One feels inclined to pity a writer so hard with himself, a writer who has never taken a real holiday for over thirty years. But pity should not be wasted on Arnold Bennett, for he does not wish for what is usually considered as a holiday. He only wishes for change of circumstances, place, atmosphere. Holidays of that description he has had many. It is still the sort of holiday which inspires him the most, and not the resolution to put his pen aside

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even for a fortnight at a time. In later years his keenness for excitement and pleasure has increased, but he indulges himself only when the day's work is over, and never to such an extent that the next day's work might suffer. Excitement might become trying to the ordinary man, but not to the keen observer of life. It stimulates his brain, which nothing escapes ; it provides precious material with which to build up new characters. Daily observation, daily experiences, are the basis of good journalism. Arnold Bennett never retires at night without having a full day's work behind him. The author of "How to Live on Twenty-four Hours a Day," "The Human Machine," "Self and Self-Management," "How to Make the Best of Life," etc., has proved to his public that what he preaches he practises. Master of his own time, he goes on making the best of it, loving work, following rules.

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CHAPTER V

HIS FIRST SUCCESS

ARNOLD BENNETT achieved his first success as a novelist in the higher sense when "The Old Wives' Tale" was published. Up to then he had written excellent novels, for instance, "A Man from the North," "Anna of the Five Towns," "Leonora," "A Great Man," but all these novels, although they had met with the approval of many connoisseurs, had had a very limited circulation. They brought the author little money, but great encouragement. They were followed by the publication of short stories and serials which, with his journalistic work, kept up his spirit and supplied him with enough money to be comfortably off.

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“The Old Wives’ Tale” had been in the mind of this original author for years. It was begun at the end of 1908, and took him only eight months to write. It was written in France, at Fontainebleau, where we had a small house which had an atmosphere of peace, independence and luxury. The work undertaken was terrific. It was an imposing enterprise, and consequently we were living, without being conscious of it at the time, in an almost religious atmosphere. I impressed the only maid we had with the fact that her master was writing an important work and needed to be encouraged with good cooking, good service, cleanliness in the house, regular hours for his meals, and no noise. The dog was trained not to bark at anybody, not even at tradesmen and tramps. The wife repressed her childish habit of singing while helping the maid with her work or taking her bath. She was trying to please in every

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way, and never to impose herself upon him.

The priest, who day after day at regular times entered his sanctuary, needed all his energy to perform his office of writing a book which, he proclaimed, was to decide whether he was to be a real success in the literary world and at last recognised as an artist and a great writer. His genius and his conscience were working hand in hand. He had decided that this book must be the greatest work of his life, at whatever cost ; and yet he was ready to accept a possible failure. The book was not written for money ; it was written to please himself first of all, and to prove to his public what he was capable of doing. The money he was to receive on the day of publication was a mere trifle. And yet Arnold Bennett was almost convinced in his own mind that the publisher would lose money by publishing such a sincere, artistic, realistic



THE DESK IN THE VILLA DES NÉFLIERS, FONTAINEBLEAU, AT WHICH "THE OLD WIVES' TALE" WAS WRITTEN.

From a water colour by Arnold Bennett.

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book. He who says so little, who can control himself so well, would often repeat with a tone of despair and disgust in his voice, "They will never understand this book I am writing . . . never!"

On the day of its publication there was not in all Fontainebleau a man more nervous, more unable to hide his nervousness, than Arnold Bennett. That morning, while fixing his tie in front of the looking-glass of our wardrobe, he exploded and said, "This day is the most important of my life! I have done my very best. . . . I shall never be able to do better. . . . It will decide our future!" I had faith in the book, because I had faith in the man. Sympathy as a rule calls for confidence, specially between husband and wife. My husband went on repeating, "No, they will never understand! . . . the book is too good, they can't possibly understand it!" The literary critics and

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the public found the book not "too good" in the sense Arnold Bennett meant, but "*good*". Excellent criticism was to be read in all the newspapers, weeklies and magazines of the time. Fame and fortune had entered our house, and have been there ever since.

It was the happy lot of a Frenchwoman to witness the effort, the anxiety and the success of a thoroughly English writer influenced by French literature, especially by the work of Maupassant, the Goncourts, Flaubert, and above all, Balzac.

H I S T R A V E L S

CHAPTER VI

HIS TRAVELS

WE know that nothing broadens the mind like travelling. It is part of the education of many people—it ought to be the chief part of the education of any artist.

How easy it is for a writer to carry his materials with him when he travels ! A pencil, a fountain-pen, a notebook ; keenness, eagerness and open eyes are all he needs. I am forgetting a Bradshaw ! If his main object is to educate himself, he needs but little money. Wandering about armed with a letter of introduction, he will meet people who are only too glad to entertain him, to help him, to give him advice and amusement

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in exchange for his company. If he is a tramp by nature, a solitary poet, having more brains than ambition, he will not get much practical knowledge from his travels. Let him go round the world with closed eyes and an open heart. Little money he needs, and little he is likely to make. What one hopes for the sake of such a man is that he has enough money to keep him going all his life.

Arnold Bennett was never a tramp, nor is he a dreamer. All his travels have had an object, and have brought him a pace forward. Whether travelling by himself or with friends, he had always been able to get the full value from his new experiences and to describe them with zest. Whether staying in an inn, boarding-house, palatial hotel or on a yacht, he never wastes his time. Human nature he finds everywhere the same. He knows how to study people, pictures, architecture, furniture. He enjoys

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seeing national costumes. He soon finds out the habits and customs of other races. He delights in the difference he finds between two beautiful women or between two beautifully built men of any nationality. He appreciates good cooking of the country or district in which he is staying. I very much doubt whether he enjoys mixing with the people of the country he visits, or sharing their mirth for more than a few moments at a time . . . just for the sake of curiosity. Artists are curious, very curious ! Arnold Bennett loves cosmopolitan hotels. He may curse at times at the crowd of people of his own race which forms the majority of those one meets in the good *pensions* and hotels all over the world. But he feels at home in them. Who can be surprised ? It would be stupid to have to do without a bath when bathrooms exist, to be in dingy and uncomfortable surroundings when one can only

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breathe freely in healthy, harmonious, well-managed palaces !

Arnold Bennett travelled a good deal before we married. The first country we saw together was Switzerland ; we spent two months in the mountains near Vevey. He was working hard then, but we found time to enjoy the winter sports. In the hotel there were only people of British birth with the exception of myself. The following winter we spent two months in Florence. He was busy writing, and in his spare time visited the museums and churches. He loved wandering alone by the River Arno, and in the streets of Florence, finding ideas and taking notes. He did not gain much from amusement during that period—we were living an extremely quiet life, getting up early and going to bed early. Life was serious. My writer husband had many sleepless nights—the cold was intense, for a bitter wind blows in Florence for four

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months of the year. Florence was the only town in Italy which we saw together till the spring of 1914, when we started from our country home in Essex for a two months' voyage. Our small Dutch yacht, the *Velsa*, and a Lanchester car were our two means of transport. The *Velsa* was sent through France by canal to Marseilles in the care of a Dutch skipper; the Lanchester through France by road to Marseilles in the care of an English chauffeur. We started from Marseilles on a most delightful, romantic, thrilling journey. Honeymoon journeys are not "in it"! My husband sailed on his yacht, and I travelled in the car, along the French and Italian coast. We used to race one another! We never stayed in an hotel, for we used to meet every evening and spend the night in our floating home. Our English chauffeur needed a guide, and this had given me the chance of saving myself the agony of sea-sickness. This

romantic, enchanting, enjoyable race of ours ended in Rome. The Dutch yacht *Velsa* accomplished, with the help of her auxiliary engine, the miracle *de remonter le Tibre*. She was anchored on the outskirts of Rome when I arrived there in the car. She was our Roman hotel. She had many visitors—she puzzled many people. Very few Dutch yachts flying the English flag had been seen on the Tiber for a long time; perhaps she was the first seen for many years, if ever! My husband was very proud of his Dutch skipper's sporting spirit in obeying his daring order—the feat of going up the Tiber on the incoming tide had been considered “impossible”, and yet there she was in Rome, as her master had said she would be!

We enjoyed Rome together, its ruins, cafés, people. My husband was engaged in serious work, only writing his journal and doing water-colour sketches. We both returned to



A VIEW OF ROME

From a water colour by Arnold Bennett, made on board his yacht,
"The Vesta."

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Paris in our car. It took us about a week from Rome to Paris—rather a rushing journey through splendid country and interesting towns—but Arnold Bennett is a man who can see more in an hour than many can see in a week or even in a lifetime! He is, however, deprived of the great joy a gradual discovery gives to the man born with a slow mind, even as he is deprived of the blessing of being a mere cabbage!

The summer before this glorious and unique experience we had visited Holland with a friend on our yacht the *Velsa*, and had had a most enjoyable cruise through the canals. What a restful, beautiful, damp country Holland is! Its skies, its landscapes, made me think of England, though Holland has a primitive atmosphere that England does not possess. It was only when I saw Holland that I understood in its full meaning the work of Holland's greatest painter, Rembrandt.

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Good as they were, the water-colours that both my husband and our friend were doing seemed to me so colourless, so far from what they should be, that I congratulated myself on not being gifted in that direction ! Both men felt disgusted with their work and with me, for I could not get enthusiastic when my opinion of their painting was asked. I remember my husband being one day in great despair about a water-colour that he was doing, and saying to our friend and to me, " If I go on painting such rotten stuff, I will throw myself into the canal ! " " Don't, my dear ! You will do a better one to-morrow ! " was my answer, at which both Arnold Bennett and our friend Rickards, thinking I had taken him seriously, roared with laughter.

In the summer of 1913, Arnold Bennett visited Denmark alone with his friend Rickards. They spent a month there together, and returned home by boat via Harwich. I was there

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waiting for them. It was very windy that day ; my pink muslin frock and white shawl were floating in the wind. My parasol could not be left open, but I used it to make a signal as soon as I could see their boat. My signal was seen ; also the woman whom, to her great annoyance, they had left behind. Not only was she alive and waiting for them, but she soon took them in her car to the comfortable English home a few miles away. Two hours later a good meal was served with good wine. Joy was in the house.

During the war, Arnold Bennett visited Scotland and Ireland with friends. Soon after the war he went to Portugal with a writer friend, Frank Swinnerton. Last spring he went to Spain. From all these travels Arnold Bennett not only gets knowledge, but manages to pay all his expenses by writing articles about his new discoveries, impressions

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and enjoyments. He is sure to go on travelling, with the same result.

What is there in the world nicer for a man than to be able to make others enjoy what he has enjoyed by the simple means of writing down what he has seen, knowing beforehand that it will be printed, read and appreciated by thousands ! Happy man !

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CHAPTER VII

H I S H O B B I E S

EVERY man, as well as every woman, ought to have a hobby ; something to do that one is not bound to do, something one likes doing, something one may drop after a short or long period without prejudice to others. The great thing to keep us alive is to have a constant stimulant to feed either the mind or the muscles.

An intellectual man whose work is sedentary ought logically to find his hobby in one of the physical branches and to go in for all possible sports. But intellectual people, especially those making a living out of their intellect, are not so logical as they imagine

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they are, and almost invariably they find their chief hobby in the sphere of brain work. Their instinct—otherwise their character and temperament—finds relaxation in the only way in which relaxation appeals to them, in mental diversion. Whatever form relaxation takes, it is bound to do one good, even if one chooses a hobby with the desire to impress others. Posing might be for the born *poseur* the best form of relaxation from his work ! The hobby one chooses marks very often the development of one's individuality. A man of forty is expected to choose a different hobby from that chosen by a man of twenty.

Arnold Bennett was forty when I first knew him. His hobby then was to play the piano—to practise his piano for hours every day. For months he seldom failed to do so. The thrilling, exciting, delightful episode of his honeymoon did not make him give up his hobby of the moment for one single day,

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any more than it led him to stop his writing ! His honeymoon was not to disorganise his everyday life, any more than marriage was to make much difference in his way of living. His time had been organised as well as his work, and nothing, not even his hobby, could be given up for the sake of his honeymoon ! Wise man ! One ought to begin married life as one means to go on, for the reaction after the excitement of a honeymoon often leads to great disappointment in everyday married life. Think of the shock a young wife has when after her honeymoon she is left alone and feels lonely because her husband is either at his office or absorbed by his work and tired at night. Her imagination might make her think that her husband's sense of romance had ended with the honeymoon. She might even go so far as to think it ended the very minute she ceased to be his fiancée in order to become his wife—the mother of his future

children. But if she is wise she realises that even if his sense of romance has apparently faded or vanished, his sense of responsibility has probably increased, and will make him a more valuable protector for herself and for his children. She will understand that he cannot see romance in hard work and responsibility. Reality faces him—he must arm himself to face reality, which is *la lutte pour la vie*. The hobby will help to free his mind from worry, to give him the chance to be “on his own”; for a man likes, above all, the sensation of absolute freedom. This sensation seems to be essential to him, and when tired of one hobby he will cast it aside in favour of another, which as likely as not was suggested to him by his wife without his realising it.

The second of my husband's hobbies since I have known him was calligraphy. He has given proof to-day in his manuscripts not only

Some Towns

Haarlem is the capital of a province, and has the air of a minor metropolis. When we moored in the Donkere Spaarne, all the architecture seemed to be saying to us, with an innocent pride, that this was the city of the illustrious Frans Hals and the only place where Frans Hals could be truly appreciated. Haarlem did not stare at strangers, as did other towns. The shops in the narrow, busy Saturday-night-streets were small and slow, and it took us most often evening to, in and out of the heavy rain, to buy three shewls, two pairs of white stockings, and some cigarettes; but the shopmen and shopwomen, despite their ignorance of English, American, and French, showed no open-mouthed provinciality at our fantastic demands. The impression upon us of the mysterious entity of the town was favourable; we felt at home. The yacht was just opposite the habitation of a

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that he practised this hobby, but that he did it splendidly, incredibly well. Many a monk whose life was employed in doing calligraphy did not do it better at the end of his life than Arnold Bennett when he first began. He was so keen on writing in different characters, especially in ordinary printing, that he wrote his long and famous novel "The Old Wives' Tale" in printed characters from beginning to end—a tremendous undertaking, requiring determination, a strong will and self-control not to lapse into ordinary writing after a few pages ! This manuscript is a most beautiful work of art, beautifully bound, and is decorated by him with original and clever illuminations. It seems incredible that a writer could get enough concentration for both inspiration and application, but Arnold Bennett accomplished this miracle. I have seen many friends to whom the manuscript was shown who would hardly believe the

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fact that it was written as a first attempt. This novel took him eight months to write.

While writing "The Old Wives' Tale," my husband was also writing a weekly literary article for the *New Age*, under the name of Jacob Tonson. This was a good joke to him—a sort of hobby, for he did it for love, and for months and months did not receive a farthing. These articles were published under the title of "Books and Persons."

His hobby of calligraphy was followed by a passion for drawing and painting in water-colours. He kept a *journal illustré*. I discovered at that time that before becoming a writer he had thought of becoming a painter, and had actually studied art for a long time with a professional artist with whom he lived in Chelsea soon after he first came to London. This artist and his wife are still numbered amongst his greatest friends. Painting was a hobby which did not disturb

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the quiet life we had to live on account of his work.

Financial success came with artistic success. We returned for a few months to Paris, which we had left for good after our wedding. While we were in Paris my husband's American publisher came over to visit him, and induced him to go to America, which was claiming him. He went to America in the autumn of 1911, and was made one of the idols of the hour. Americans are very hospitable, very kind. One values their hospitality highly, for it is given with keenness and sincerity, and with no expectation of reward. He had no time for any hobby in America—unless taking a bath three times a day may be called a hobby, as well as a stimulant to enable him to cope with the strain American hospitality was to him !

At last, his financial position being assured, he was able to indulge in a hobby which he

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had longed for all his life—yachting. He bought a Dutch yacht, the *Velsa*, which at that time was anchored in the Thames at Richmond. She was a splendid boat, very roomy, and could be used both on the sea and on canals. Her new owner made her more comfortable even than she was before, and spared no money on her. Among other things, she had a new engine and new sails. Arnold Bennett loves the sea. While cruising he would occasionally help the crew, but his greatest pleasure was to be at the wheel for hours at a time. He kept the *Velsa* for years, and while on her he enjoyed himself, did some of his writing, and recuperated his health.

With his continued success and the long run of the play “Milestones,” written in collaboration with Edward Knoblock, money was plentiful. We decided to settle in the country in England, and in 1913 bought a comfortable



ARNOLD BENNETT AT THE WHEEL OF HIS YACHT,
"THE VELSA."

Georgian mansion in Essex—at Thorpe-le-Soken. He had no main hobby during that time, only the excitement of a new place—the control of the garden, of the cellar ; the winding of the clocks ; the long walks in the neighbourhood either alone or followed by one of our dogs ; the friendly talks with the men on the roads, or the schoolmaster of the village, or the postman, or the station-master ; games of tennis on our own ground or at the tennis club at Frinton-on-Sea ; and the ever-present delightful sensation of feeling lord and master of a new house—a house run according to his own ideas, to please himself first of all because of his work. It was a machine whose every part was so well known and understood by him that any accident happening would find him able to put it straight with a word !

In the summer of 1914 his great hobby was still yachting. He started for Dieppe,

but on arriving there was not allowed to land, as war had just been declared between France and Germany. The *Velsa* was lent to the Admiralty for the duration of the war, and there was no more question of yachting for the next six years, at the end of which the *Velsa* was repaired and sold.

My husband had more work than he could cope with during the war, and consequently we were not disturbed by financial worries. We had officers billeted on us; we were able to open our house to the officers who were stationed near us, and their friends and families were also welcome. Arnold Bennett loved to entertain them and cheer them with a true feeling of hospitality. Just before the war our cellars had been well filled with wines from France, and it was his greatest pleasure to think that he had these at his disposal for their benefit. He is well known as an exceptionally good host.

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His war work called him to London for part of the week. In spite of his work he felt the need for a new hobby, and studied black-and-white drawing with an artist. For over a year he had a weekly lesson at his house, where he was welcomed as a friend by both the artist and his wife. They were charming people whom I did not have the opportunity of meeting until afterwards, when my husband had given up this hobby on account of increasing war work, and the printing press bought for the purpose was rusting in the work-room of our country house.

Arnold Bennett was made Director of the Ministry of Information for two months towards the end of the war. He gave up his own work entirely, and received no salary. He found time to attend important war charity meetings, of which he was one of the principal and most efficient members on the Committee for years. He wasted no time and lost no

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opportunity of helping to organise when his help was required, for he is a born organiser. He hates indiscriminate charity, but he knew where to give intelligently.

He had a great deal to do with politics during the war, and enjoyed mixing with politicians —no hobby could have given him more pleasure than writing political articles.

I am inclined to add to his list of hobbies those which occupied all his spare time from 1919 onwards, when he was interesting himself in modern painting, in buying pictures and in meeting young painters ; in reading modern poetry and in meeting young poets, musicians, pianists, actors and actresses.

During the last few years he has found relaxation in dancing and in theatrical enterprises, but he still derives the greatest pleasure from yachting during the summer months on his splendid new yacht, the *Marie-Marguerite*—although the yachting season is

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somewhat spoilt by his theatrical undertakings, which call him back to London.

All these hobbies are very important and interesting to him. They are also beneficial to many, for an efficient man stimulates others, gives confidence to the weak, strength to the courageous and gifted, and when he has popularity, it reflects on those with whom he associates.

CHAPTER VIII

HIS FRIENDS

IT is rather difficult to ascertain who are people's friends ; it is hard enough to be sure who are one's own. Human nature being so complex, friendship, even with our most intimate and faithful friends, is often put through such ordeals and trials that at times, when things come to the point of settling moral or material differences, one wonders if such a thing as a real friend exists. But, without being too exacting (for one should not be too exacting), if one is wise enough to take human nature into consideration, friends, good friends, faithful friends, do exist. Almost all of us have some in our lives. Close friendship is easier to achieve, in my opinion,

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in our youth than later in life ; for in growing older one becomes more and more critical, more and more difficult to please. Some people are born with such over-sensitive natures that they do not seem to feel the need of a really intimate friend. They go on through life having many acquaintances and imagining that some of them are their intimate friends. Close and lasting friendship between two people born with reserved, sensitive or self-reliant natures is difficult to achieve at any time of life—constant attempts are made by them and constant failures have to be registered in their minds and hearts. If you were to stop any man or woman in the street and to ask him or her, “ Have you such a thing as a real intimate friend, to whom you can say everything and from whom you can ask anything ? ” they would probably hesitate before saying, “ Yes, I have ! ” Of course, I would not expect them to mention

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the name of their mother or father, husband or wife or lover. Where sex is taken into consideration, or where one's family is concerned, friendship has another character altogether.

I would include Arnold Bennett among those who would hesitate before answering, "Yes, I have!" Though he has, and always will have, many friends, he does not feel the need for a very intimate friendship as most of us do. He is one of those who are gifted with charm and personality. He realises that he can make friends—devoted friends, affectionate friends, faithful friends. He prefers to choose his friends among those whose characters are decidedly weak or decidedly strong ; the weak are in the majority. Confidence, devotion and admiration are given to the strong man. In return he gives advice, compassion, moral support ; and in a crisis, if he is well off, he will help with his money. Nothing pleases one more than being loved, admired

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and listened to. Arnold Bennett is not such a hypocrite as not to admit that he falls to this human weakness. He is never so happy as when genial admiration is shown to him either by letter or in conversation. He is never so pleased with himself as when he has a chance to do a good deed. His kindness of heart is proverbial amongst his family and long-standing friends. He is generous in helping, with advice or money, those for whom he is sorry and whom he considers deserving of help. When he has promised his assistance one can rely on his word—the word of the philosopher and the business man. I would not like him to blush, so I must *passer sous silence* magnificent deeds of his which would illustrate what I am saying. His modesty I must save, for he is modest as well as shy, though one would not suspect this without knowing him intimately. Nevertheless, with all these qualities—sympathy,

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generosity, understanding—he can at times be extremely harsh, cruel, and pitiless. In many instances, if someone appeals to his good nature and he thinks they are trying to take advantage of him, they will find a blank wall. His reason, his well-known common sense, his sense of justice, seem to have vanished, together with his nice feelings, for ever and ever. When he is in these rare and extraordinary moods he will not listen to reason. The friends he loves the most he trusts the least, and seems determined to hide from them all his kind feelings ; this is a characteristic of the district he comes from. He is suspicious—not as a rule so suspicious of weak, kind-hearted people as of his intellectual equals—and yet he is not by nature a suspicious man. Understanding and generosity are in him, yet his obstinacy often has the better of him.

Protection and affection from Arnold Bennett

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are the most valuable things, for when he gives them to anyone he does not act on impulse ; he knows the reason for the beginning of friendship, he foresees its development and its possible end. He is never deceived. Hundreds of friends will go on putting him on a pedestal during his lifetime and perhaps after, for he will be a good friend to many till he dies. Women will go on admiring him, praising him or hating him ; many taking him as a confidant, even as a confessor. Men on the whole admire him, envy him ; no doubt they will go on doing so. He has had for years many friends among celebrated writers—friends like H. G. Wells, Hugh Walpole, Frank Swinnerton. He has many friends among his public who are likely never to meet him. In America he has a faithful friend in George Doran, his publisher.

Arnold Bennett is well aware that he is regarded with both admiration and envy.

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Probably he is also despised by many, for it is an impossibility to please everybody, to have no enemies, even among those who were once upon a time our greatest friends ; for many of us may any day lose the closest friend we have through our own fault, or the fault of others, or the force of circumstances.

HIS NEED OF LUXURY

CHAPTER IX

HIS NEED OF LUXURY

“THE best is good enough for me.” This is one of Arnold Bennett’s favourite remarks.

Yes, the best is good enough for most of us. To Arnold Bennett such a remark puts all he wants into a nutshell. It explains to others how very easy it is to satisfy him, to please him. “The best is good enough for me; give me the best and I shall be satisfied.”

In the end “the best” is the lot of the man of discernment. He knows how to work in order to get it; how to fight, how to observe, how to use patience, diplomacy, how to keep calm. He knows what he wants, and he gets it, having become gradually a specialist in the art of living. Like everybody else, Arnold

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Bennett started as an amateur in all branches of life, but where so many remain amateurs all their lives, he has become a specialist in many branches. Being a specialist, he knows a good thing when he sees it, good people when he meets them. He can only put up with good things, first-class things. Nothing is too good for him. He lives a luxurious life, surrounded by luxury, with people who love luxury. Luxury is absolutely essential to both the artist and the man. When he travels he must have first-class accommodation. He must stay in first-class hotels, the best, the most expensive of them all. For he believes, like Ham Carve, the hero of his play "The Great Adventure," that it is cheapest in the end. His nervous system requires that he shall have central heating in his house, plenty of light, first-class food, the best wines, cigars and cigarettes, a comfortable bed ; his eyes must rest upon beautiful things ; his clothes

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must be made by first-class tailors (the King's tailor is "good enough for him"), and he orders the best materials they can procure. He renews his wardrobe twice a year. His gesture in casting his clothes away is the gesture of a man who is enjoying the thought of having new clothes to replace them; the thought of being numbered among those who can give themselves the luxury of casting away clothes which are almost new, among those who can throw money away when the fancy takes them without troubling about their bank balance.

I do not think it is indiscreet of me to reveal the secret, which is only a *secret de polichinelle*, and to repeat what he himself has said to many of his friends when they have happened to wonder why on earth he goes on working so hard when there is no apparent reason for doing so. "My boy, you don't understand that the great thing which makes me go on

writing and writing is simply that I must. . . . I love work. . . . I believe in work. . . . the only thing worth living for. . . . Apart from that, between you and me, if I had not heavy expenses to cope with I would not work quite so hard as I do. . . . I love luxury, and luxury costs money. . . . I could not work so hard if I did not know that my luxuries depend upon what I earn. I make plenty of money and I like spending it. . . . I hate debts, and yet if I know that I owe money it makes me work harder than ever. . . . I could not work if I did not have to see that my bank balance is on the right side; it would be a terrible catastrophe if I had no money in the bank! Everything is futile, my boy, just good enough for children . . . the children you and I are at times." All this sounds contradictory, puzzling, most extraordinary to many of his listeners, especially to his foreign friends.

HIS NEED OF LUXURY

The man, the child, the philosopher, the artist in him, all combine to make him one of the very few men who know the value of everything and everybody, who revel in luxurious surroundings and beautiful things, enjoying them the more because he has to work for them. It would be as impossible for Arnold Bennett to go back to the simple provincial life he once led as it is for an actress to keep away from the stage for long.

There is no reason whatsoever why Arnold Bennett should not have changed his mode of living by degrees as his success has increased. A man who can afford to have luxury should do so : it is less a crime than hoarding money. We only live once—at any rate, that is the general belief. Let us live ! Let any man who can afford to have a large house, many servants, motor-cars and yachts, do so by all means. It will inspire him in one way or

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another. Let money circulate for the benefit of the few and for the benefit of the community. I myself see no harm in luxury—I adore it. “The best is good enough for me.” Like my husband, I want to have full value for the money I spend ; to me, as to him, luxury does not mean waste and carelessness. I could never and would never work like a slave in order to lead a life of luxury. What an achievement to have been able to train oneself like Arnold Bennett has done to enjoy with equal zest both slavery and luxury ! My husband is one of the few men I know who are able to do so. He is an apostle of Work and Pleasure whose great desire is that others shall know how to train themselves to become thoroughly efficient in the work they have chosen, to become connoisseurs of life. For them he has written many essays. A few years ago he published a remarkable book in which he gives away all his secrets, “How to

HIS NEED OF LUXURY

Make the Best of Life." If we follow his advice, we shall make "the best of life", whatever our circumstances may be. We cannot all be "born in the right bedroom"; we cannot all apply our talents in a superlatively remunerative branch of work.

It is a good thing my husband has created in his novels people who live in modest, sometimes even in sordid, surroundings, and that he realises that they can at times indulge in what they call luxuries, such as buying a cake from a confectioner, or a box of chocolates, or imitations of expensive furs; otherwise, many reading what I have written about his needs and tastes may think that one of our best-known public men has not realised that few need luxury to such an extent. As a rule, a lover of mankind, a philosopher, does not think so much of his own well-being as Arnold Bennett and many other artists do. I am the last one to find

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fault with his way of living, for it inspires him in his work—work which preaches a doctrine that is a great help to many who do not know how to guide themselves and to make the best of life.

HIS ACHIEVEMENTS

CHAPTER X

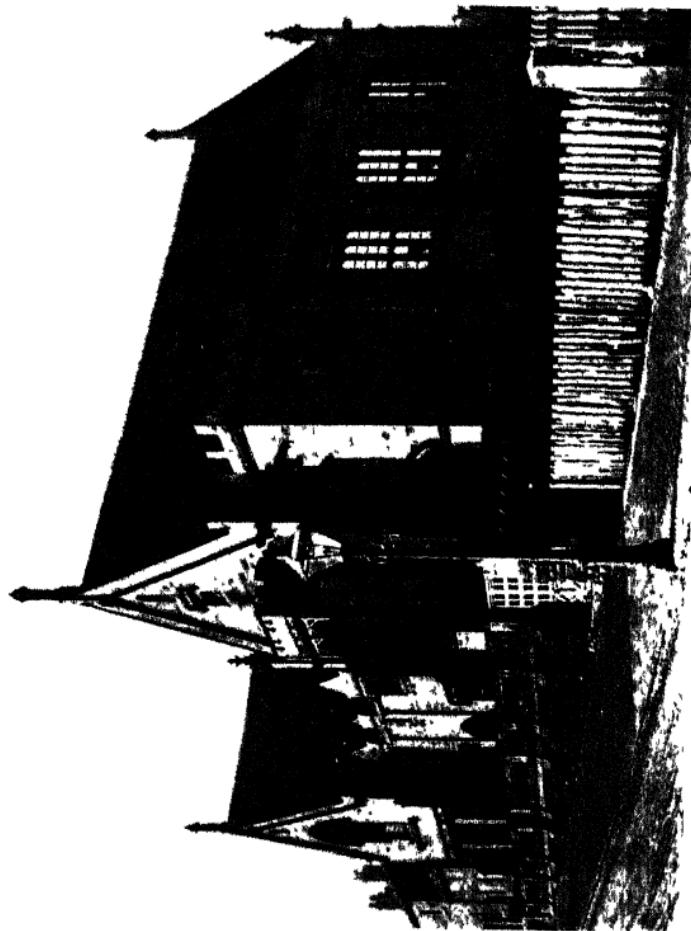
HIS ACHIEVEMENTS

I.

AN ambitious man with a cool head, a lot of courage, initiative and good principles, if not handicapped by bad health or real bad luck, and if he has personality, is bound to achieve a brilliant career. Arnold Bennett has personality. In his first manhood, when he left the Newcastle Middle School, where he was educated, he began life as a solicitor's clerk in his father's office. Reading, writing and water-colour sketching were his pastimes. While still very young he was induced to contribute to a local newspaper. He loved writing articles, which attracted attention by their daring and originality.

ARNOLD BENNETT

His interest in local journalism, his interest in the routine of a provincial solicitor's office, was soon exhausted, and a desire to know other places than his own took hold of him. His inborn energy, his courage, his initiative, his objection to the authority of a hard father, all combined to send him, at the age of twenty-one, to the place of his destiny—London. There he worked as clerk to a solicitor. After a few years (having in the meantime written articles and short stories for newspapers) he left the law in order to become a journalist only. Step by step, he succeeded in making an impression in Fleet Street. He became assistant editor, then editor-in-chief, of a magazine written chiefly by women on women's topics. He acquired then his knowledge of women. He appreciated their virtues, he discerned their shortcomings. With his piercing eyes and keen observation he penetrated as far as he was able the secret nature of



THE NEWCASTLE MIDDLE SCHOOL, STAFFS., WHERE ARNOLD BENNETT
WAS EDUCATED, NOW CALLED THE ORME BOYS' SCHOOL.

H I S A C H I E V E M E N T S

women. He became suspicious of them—curiously enough, he has remained so. He fears their flattery, yet he enjoys it. He discerns their sincerity, he appreciates their sincerity, yet a gesture, a caressing tone of the voice, puts him on his guard. He is a most sympathetic friend to them and can be a most delightful and entertaining companion. He divides women into categories—those with kind hearts, those who are deceitful, those who are interesting, those who are dull, those who are capable, and those who are stupid. Women of any age interest him. He can make a friend of any woman if he chooses to do so. He is supposed to be the writer of his generation who understands women the most thoroughly. And yet the finest part in woman he has not seen—the veil of her individuality he has not thrown back. He calls it “mystery”, in common with many psychologists.

Very few writers indeed have penetrated

the secret nature of women. Very few have done them justice ; for it is given to few to understand woman's complex individuality. Arnold Bennett has written more about women than any other English author of his generation. His courage has no limit. After writing "*Leonora*", "*Carlotta*", "*Hilda Lessways*", "*Helen with the High Hand*", he wrote his famous book, "*The Pretty Lady*," which he felt would fill a gap in English literature. All the women in these novels are splendidly drawn. One feels one has known them. But in spite of the amazingly understanding way in which the author accounts for their actions, thoughts and deeds, something is just missing in them all, something spiritual which is hiding itself in part of the nature of almost every woman. In his dramatic work also he has created splendid characters of women, but although all of them, like the women of his novels, are so human, so full of

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good feeling, patience and sincerity, they are deprived of the spark which would make them as immortal as Cleopatra, Thaïs, Juliette, Andromache, Phædra.

II.

Like many other authors of fiction, Arnold Bennett has chosen his native district as a medium for his work. As Balzac selected his own part of France when he wrote his "Comédie Humaine," so Arnold Bennett, with equal sureness and mastery, selected the Five Towns. Only about thirty years ago few people outside their inhabitants had heard of Bursley, Hanbridge, Knype, Longshaw and Turnhill. Those who had heard of them knew them only as places where pottery was manufactured; where everything was dirty and unromantic. But the Five Towns were to Arnold Bennett a stage of sufficient importance to accommodate all the human passions

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he wanted to describe in his realistic novels. He has made romance out of them. He is known as "the novelist of the Five Towns"—a name of his own creation. This group of towns should really include a sixth, which Arnold Bennett has chosen to ignore. His last book, "Riceyman Steps", written about London, is equal to his best work about his own district. In it romance is made out of everyday existence. He deals with sordid people, sordid surroundings, as he does in many of his books about the Five Towns.

Eighteen years ago Arnold Bennett wrote about twenty-five plays which were not accepted by theatrical managers, or if accepted and paid for, were not produced, but since then he has had some of his plays produced with great success. His famous play "Milestones", written in collaboration with Edward Knoblock, was a triumph, and has since then been filmed. He had another big success with

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“The Great Adventure”, which had a run of about two years and ended soon after war was declared. That play was revived, after ten years, on Thursday, the 5th June, 1924, at the Haymarket Theatre, the very theatre in which Arnold Bennett had wished for twenty-five years to have one of his plays produced. It had been one of his greatest ambitions; therefore the 5th June, 1924, was one of the greatest days of his wonderful career. It was a great triumph to the man who had sworn that he would not die before seeing at least one of his plays produced at the Haymarket Theatre, the theatre he has always considered the best.

Not only has Arnold Bennett written plays, but in the last few years he has been associated with theatrical management. About a year ago he was made one of the Directors of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, after having been for some time one of the leading spirits

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in this most successful enterprise. He has given his time and energy without receiving a penny in return. He was also interested in the taking over of another London theatre, the name of which has been changed to the "Regent Theatre", after a book by my husband. The ambitious hero of that book built a theatre which he named "The Regent".

Arnold Bennett's capability as a business man is notorious amongst his friends, publishers and managers. Many people go to him for advice. As an author his name is famous throughout the English-speaking world. In America, the land where a reputation is soon built and soon dies, he has had a prominent place for fifteen years, and his circulation there is extremely good. His work has been from the first published there by George Doran, his most devoted friend. His books have been translated into many languages; a

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complete edition of his works is now being prepared. Years ago he might have had a title, but he did not wish for a title—titles are against his principles. To him, a man who thinks anything of himself should do without a title, unless he likes to please his wife. His play “The Title”, which was produced at the end of the war, illustrates emphatically all his ideas on the subject. If any man in the writing world deserves a title, he does, and I shall always regret his attitude.

Arnold Bennett is his own master. He can condescend, command, dominate, to his own liking. He has achieved all his ambitions. He is one of the masters of English literature. His popularity is increasing every year. No one is more aware of his success than he is himself. No one enjoys success more than he does. He gets up every morning convinced, or trying to be convinced, that life is

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a constant and most thrilling romance, that nothing is wrong in it except, perhaps, poverty. Fortunately for him, he will never experience poverty. The gods will in all probability continue to walk side by side with him, and to guide him on the path which may possibly lead him to immortality.

H I S H E A L T H

CHAPTER XI

H I S H E A L T H

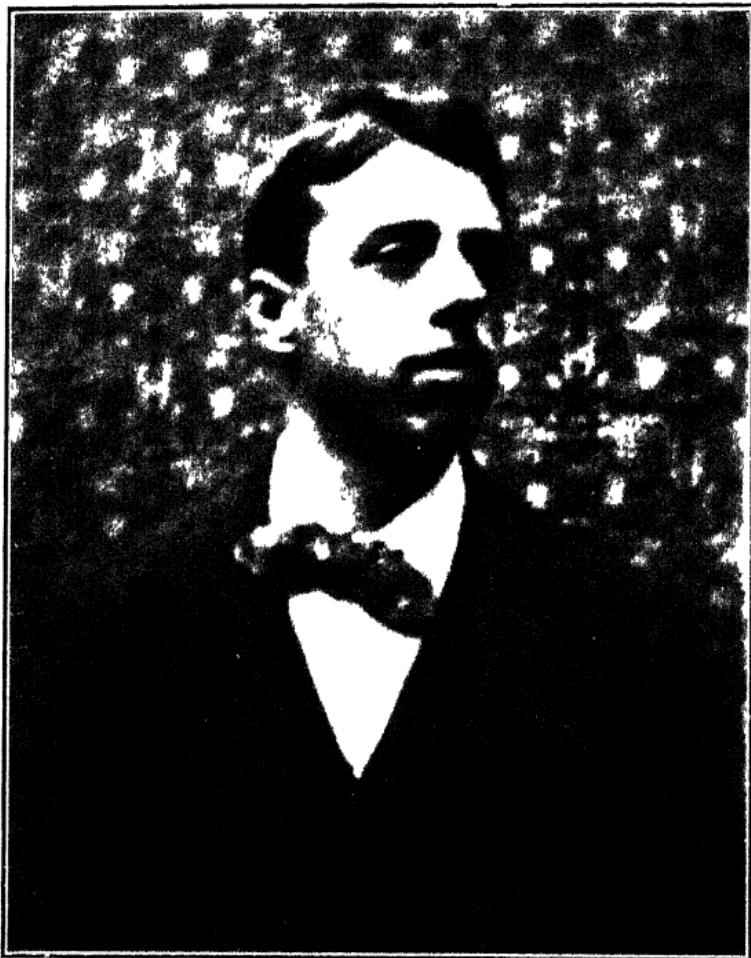
ARNOLD BENNETT was born in the trying, damp climate of the Five Towns, where all the inhabitants seem to get one cold on the top of another. He was brought up in that climate, and I believe that in his home there was no atmosphere of tenderness and *laissez-aller* as is the case in most families. Facts were facts ; they had to be faced. Endurance, discipline and regular habits helped one to face them. They accepted everything as a matter of course.

Arnold Bennett was a healthy child, and escaped most infantile illnesses. He is the eldest of a family of six—three girls and three boys, all of whom are still living—and being

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the eldest, he was the most thought of. His parents were very proud of him. Without being an athlete, he developed into a well-built, well-disciplined man in mind and body. To his mother, who lived until the age of seventy-two (and died during the first year of the war), he could do no wrong. He was his father's pride. It was a well-known fact that his father could not conceal his pride in him, in spite of his efforts to do so. On his death-bed he constantly repeated the name of his eldest and beloved son : " Arnold ! Arnold ! "

Arnold Bennett has a highly strung temperament, which is noticeable in spite of his calm manner. An accident which he had when he was about twelve may have increased his inborn sensibility. While playing with a mangle he caught his hand, which was badly smashed. The nervous shock was intense. It affected the delivery of his words, and caused him to stammer, which he had never



ARNOLD BENNETT AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS CAREER.

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before been noticed to do. He has never been absolutely cured of this. Though his fear of being unable to deliver his words at a psychological moment has somewhat handicapped him in his private and public life, it has, no doubt, given him other advantages no less valuable to the career of a man of letters—it gives him time to reflect before speaking, for example.

Most of Arnold Bennett's illnesses have been caused through nerves, and have not been serious. His life has twice been in danger, however—once through an accident caused by mere obstinacy, another time through a bad attack of poisoning due to bad food. I had not known him for very long when he had this attack of poisoning. I nursed him, and naively imagined that if I had not nursed him myself he might have died. I could not have had him die! It is easy to nurse Arnold Bennett when he is very ill. He is a good

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patient. One enjoys nursing a beloved patient ; it gives one the opportunity of exercising patience, of making use of one of woman's inborn gifts—nursing, of showing devotion, affection, love. A wife who sees very little of her husband, whose greatest grievance is that she does not see enough of him, regrets the suffering illness may cause her patient, but she is secretly happy to have the chance of having him to herself. This sounds silly, unreasonable and selfish : perhaps it is selfish, unreasonable and silly, but some married women, especially the childless wife, will understand me. Like me, however, she will never be so unkind as to wish her husband a long illness.

Everybody around Arnold Bennett, including his lady secretary and his servants, thinks about him first of all—his welfare, his health. No money has ever been spared on doctors, specialists or medicine for him. He

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has the art of looking after himself ; when at a loss about his health, he looks in his Medical Encyclopædia ! He has, both in his house and on his yacht, a complete medicine-case. His body is a well-known organism to him, and he tries to keep it in good condition. He knows that to conserve one's energy is to prolong one's life. He does his best to remain a moderate man with regular habits. He knows that late hours are bad for him, too much mental work pernicious ; therefore he sees that he has plenty of rest. As I have said before, he rests every day after lunch. As a rule he retires to his bedroom, and often gets right into bed, for about an hour.

He believes in taking medicine. One of his pet habits is to try new medicines recommended by his friends when he happens to complain to them of sleepless nights, bad headaches, bad digestion, rheumatism, etc. When gently laughed at for this weakness he does not

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mind, any more than he minds criticism of his ways or of his work. He knows that *he* is right. A man does not fear criticism, when he is sure to obtain ultimately what he wants. He ignores criticism; he remains absolutely calm and indifferent to it. He is not resentful of his critic, any more than he is jealous of anybody, except that he may perhaps in certain moods secretly resent a personality as strong as his own which might influence him and set him thinking. As a rule the personality the strong man fears the most, resents the most, is the personality of the woman he loves.

Not only does my husband like to take medicine, but he loves people to be interested in his health. When a friend remarks, "How well you look!" he will answer, "I feel A1, thanks to Eno's Fruit Salt," if at the time he happens to be swearing by Eno's Fruit Salt. He swears in turn by the virtues of countless

different pills, tablets, liquids, etc. The best of his pick-me-ups, however, is a good plain meal of roast mutton or roast beef ("nothing like it!" as they say in the Five Towns). Meat agrees with him. Champagne is a beverage he praises highly as a perfect thing for rebuilding the nervous system.

At the age of fifty-seven Arnold Bennett is the picture of health. He is stronger than ever, his spirit is brighter than ever. If as a boy, as a young man, as a man, he had ever been able to demonstrate joy by dancing, shouting or joking, or by throwing pillows or cushions into the faces of others, he would to-day go to the most childish extravagances out of the joy of feeling "Al".

Arnold Bennett's numerous doctor friends consider him an ideal patient, for when he is ill he follows their advice most conscientiously. He knows how to use his own judgment when the time comes. He knows a great deal about

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medical science, and has made good use of this knowledge in his books.

Doctors proclaim that he is a strong and healthy man. I hope he is not so strong and healthy as the valet of Ilam Carve, the hero of "The Great Adventure", for in that case, if he should have pneumonia he might die ! "It is a highly dangerous thing to be strong and healthy," as the doctor informs us in that play. Doctors have said that Arnold Bennett is very likely to see many friends of his own age or under his age take, before his time comes, the supreme step—death—which will bring us immortality or *néant*. The thought of death upsets most of us. The mystery of what may follow is one of the greatest subconscious preoccupations of many idealists and materialists. Many idealists will die with the regret of not having made better use of their present existence ; many materialists with their consciences accusing them.

HIS INFLUENCE

CHAPTER XII

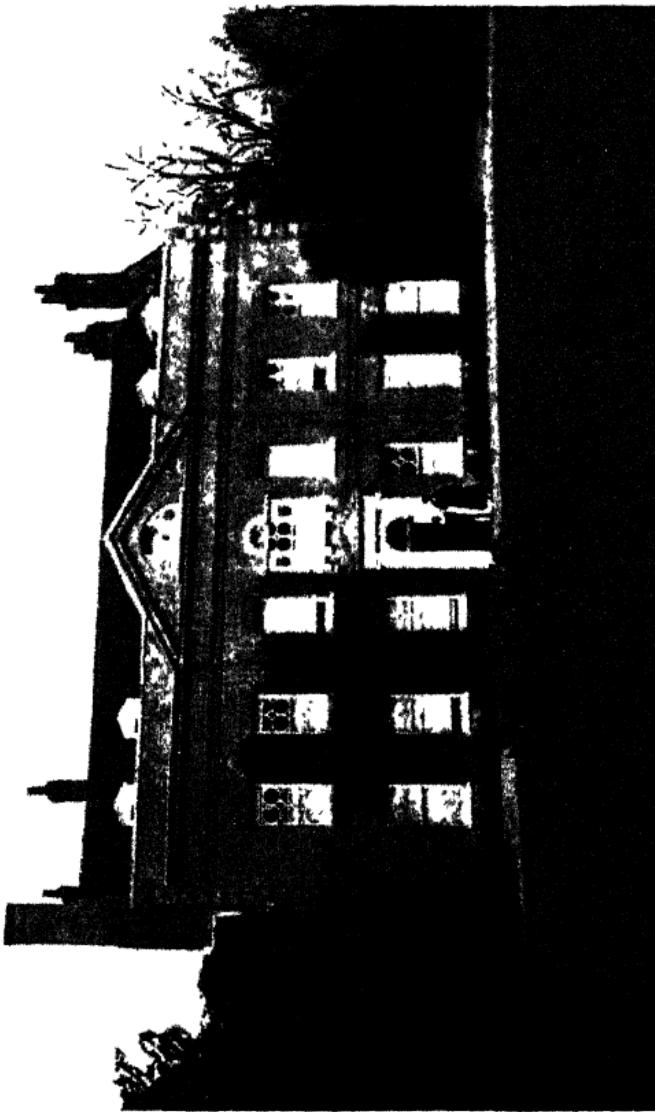
HIS INFLUENCE

I WILL not attempt to describe Arnold Bennett's influence on modern literature. I am not in a position to do so. What there is to be said on the subject is being said by others. The critics of generations to come will trace his real influence—time alone brings lasting fame or partial or total neglect. He is in a way a new force whose work is inspiring to many. The writers born a generation after him who have assimilated the literary work of this original genius have greatly benefited by it. Frank Swinnerton and Hugh Walpole, for instance, have been very much influenced by Arnold Bennett's novels. When their own first work was published, my husband

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singled them out from among many young writers of their generation as being exceptionally gifted, and foresaw their success. He desired to meet them. He had no difficulty in doing so ; they were already his disciples, they became his friends. My husband's influence as an artist and as a man has been tremendous on both young men. Arnold Bennett revels in their company and friendship. We made their acquaintance about fourteen years ago, before the war, and frequently entertained them at Comarques, where we usually had people staying with us for week-ends. Comarques was a Georgian house, named after a Huguenot family who landed on the East Coast after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

Arnold Bennett had many long talks with Hugh Walpole and Frank Swinnerton about literature, art, and life in general, and gave them valuable help by constructive criticism



COMMARQUES, THORPE-LE-SOKEN.

The country house where Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Bennett entertained during the War.

HIS INFLUENCE

of their work. He gave them all the time he could spare while they were visiting us. When he was busy writing or resting, or wanted his time to himself, I delighted in keeping them company. We have spent many, many agreeable hours together strolling in our beautiful garden, or sitting by the fire, or wandering about the flat country around our estate, exchanging ideas and having free talks. My English was imperfect—it is still. It used to tickle their sense of humour, and caused many a “giggle”, as my husband would call my childish fits of laughter.

Arnold Bennett's influence on some people is remarkable. With a few words he will change their outlook on life, their plans about choosing a career. He will put new ideas into their minds which they are eager to accept. He loves to be loved, he likes people to think well of him—curiously enough, he will even sometimes go out of his way when

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he particularly wants them to do so. I have seen him influence painters and musicians as well as writers and ordinary men. He knows how to make people feel at home, and yet I have known people terrified of him. On the whole, almost everybody fears his judgment—the judgment of a man full of common sense, a man conscious of everything, conscious of people's attitude of mind, a man difficult to please, therefore worth pleasing. His company is always invigorating. Arnold Bennett loves to discover what people are made of—what they are cut out to be. He loves to improve them, to influence them. For instance, he likes to induce a dreamer to keep a journal, for it will help him to concentrate. Arnold Bennett loves also to influence clergymen, to give them his ideas on how to write a good sermon and how to deliver a sermon. I know politicians, public speakers, who have been influenced and helped by him. He has

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influenced many business men, University men, even Generals ! He succeeds pretty well in making people do what he wants them to do, what he thinks is good for them. On the whole, Arnold Bennett's advice is invaluable.

He loves to give advice. For instance, when a friend of his is going to be married, he makes a point of advising him as to how to behave with his wife if he means to be happy. He believes that one of the couple should lead in almost everything, and that the one to do so should be the husband. I can hear him saying, "Take the lead, my boy ! Make up your mind never to find yourself in the wrong . . . never to admit that you are in the wrong . . . have your own way ! It is so easy !" But many husbands find it is not so easy. They realise that we are no longer in the Victorian era, when a wife expected to be dictated to, to be neglected by her lord and

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master, because she was convinced that men were superior to women and that a husband could do no wrong. To-day a wife insists upon being treated as an equal; she expects to be her husband's greatest friend and collaborator. She is ready to make allowances, but she will not stand any nonsense. She claims equal privileges, for the law has at last given her equal privileges. She loves to be influenced by her husband, to learn from him, but she refuses to be dominated.

Arnold Bennett's influence on me, his wife, began the very minute I met him, and has ever since been tremendous. My own personality, which when I first met him was developing, and which developed still more quickly under his influence, seemed soon after we were married to vanish entirely. I was completely absorbed by my duties as a wife, the wife of a writer engrossed in his work; his personality was overpowering and made me feel like a

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schoolgirl afraid to do the wrong thing ; afraid to be late for meals, afraid lest the meat should be underdone or too much done, lest the dog should bark, lest the table should not be set in the way my English husband liked it set, *à la manière anglaise*. I approved of English ways in the management of a home. I had always loved English ways and customs, but I needed time to become an expert. I would not give myself time. I was over-anxious, over-conscientious, and was eager to have everything perfect, always to look nice, to be well dressed. The strain was great. I did too much, I was over-tired, and ended by having a nervous breakdown, which I tried to conceal from my husband. I was over-sensitive, and while in my heart feeling very happy to have a husband I loved, I felt at the same time very miserable. Not only did I no longer laugh, but I had to force myself in order to smile. This was very stupid, very

tragic. I felt sorry for my husband ; I was afraid his work would suffer.

For the first few years his strong personality reduced mine to *nil*. I did not care ; I was quite happy to be only a wife, and the life of an artist's wife is always particularly interesting. It is stupid for a wife *de rentrer en lutte*, for it will only create misery and difficulty for the one she loves and for herself ; moreover, she is defeated beforehand ! Yet circumstances may cause her attitude to change. Let us imagine that war is declared between Power and Weakness, and after every struggle Weakness is made to ask for armistice, does ask for armistice. Each time while waiting for peace, Weakness reflects upon the reason which brought war, and each time gains so much wisdom, so much knowledge of human nature, that gradually Weakness becomes equal to Power. What will be the end ? War will have to cease.

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My husband's personality reacted on me year after year, and gradually developed all the combativeness, the endurance, the patience, that were in me. It made me less impulsive, more prudent in speech and deeds. It gave me self-determination and strength of mind to be self-reliant.

The new outlook on life thus given made me often reflect upon the painful truth that we have to find our happiness in ourselves, that whatever we do we are miserably alone, very seldom understood by those whom we love most, whom we believe we understand the best. I was lonely. An artist's wife must expect to be lonely at times, for an artist, good husband though he may be, is absorbed by his work, and cannot give her the companionship an ordinary man can give. My loneliness made me return to the poetry I had always loved. In my hours of solitude I found in poetry a great relief. Although I

had happiness, comfort, luxury, my mental vitality was at times crying for action. I started again to learn poems by heart ; I loved learning them whilst walking or sitting in our garden. Once a poem had found a place in my mind, it seemed to enter my heart and soul ; I recited it to myself, taking delight in the music of the words and the feeling it expressed. I wanted it to be heard by everybody, understood by everybody. I felt that I could interpret it so that they could understand. I wanted the public to revel, like the poet and myself, in its beautiful music, its subtle and profound meaning. I wished to recite it to an audience, yet I knew it was a hopeless ambition, impossible to realise at that time. My place was in the country with my husband. I loved being there. The Great War found me with that ambition of reciting in public still in my heart, but soon my activities were turned in quite another direction.

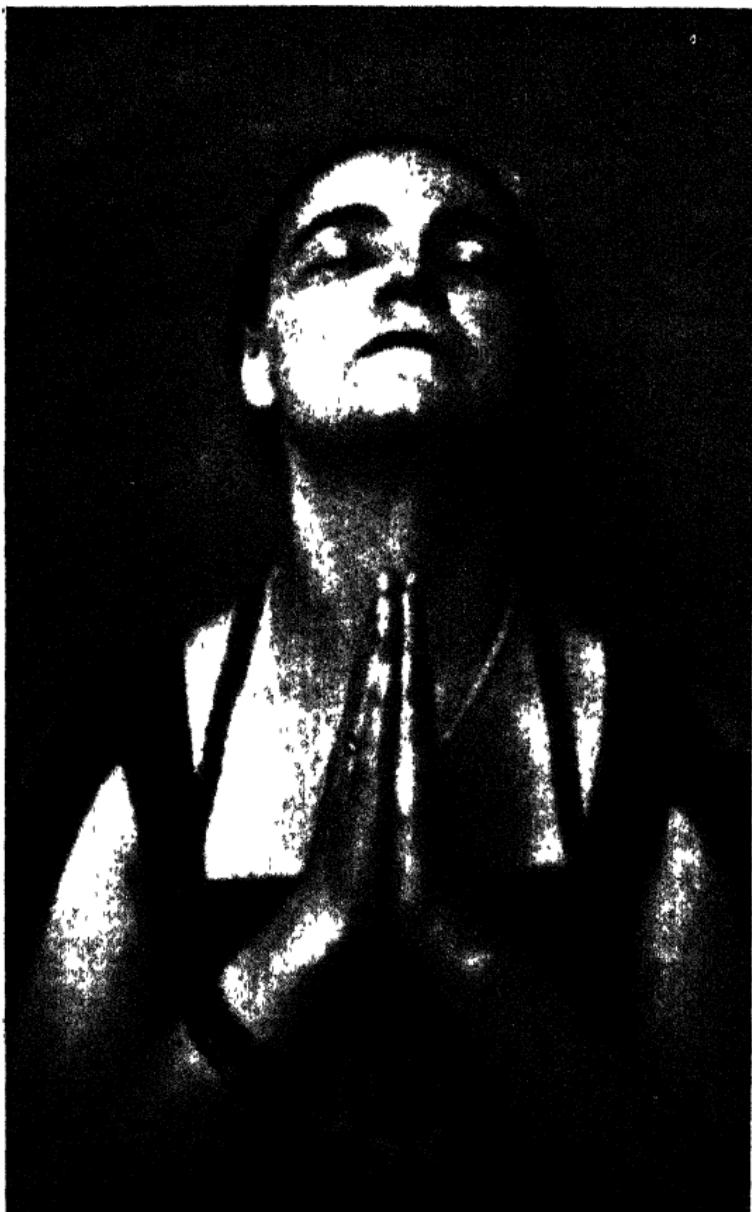


Photo by]

[Dorothy Hickling.

MRS. ARNOLD BENNETT INTERPRETING A POEM
BY VERLAINE.

H I S I N F L U E N C E

The east coast was being guarded, and we had troops in our village. We did all that lay in our power to help the officers and soldiers to enjoy themselves, to give them a good time. I was told that this was the best work I could possibly do, though at times I felt it could hardly be called "work" because of the pleasure I derived from it. I formed a club for the Tommies. We had a wooden hut built in our grounds, and I ordered what was needed—chairs, tables, games, crockery. Tea and coffee were served there. We had a stage and a piano, and I organised entertainments, finding talent among the soldiers, the officers and my friends. My husband came to one of the entertainments and was amused. One day I sang for them an old French popular song. They loved it, and from that day I was the favourite artiste of our company. So that the soldiers should understand, I wrote English words to French tunes—silly lines which used

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to amuse them immensely. To amuse them was my purpose. Some of my songs became so popular that they would sing the choruses in the village. One ran like this :

“It is a club for the soldiers,
It is a club, it is,
Where the men go
And where they like to go.”

The most popular lines I wrote were about a regiment stationed in our village which was shortly going overseas, and I was often asked to sing it :

“We hear that very soon the R.F.A.
May go to foreign lands
Far, far away.
Oh, shan’t we weep and cry,
Cry and weep and weep and sigh,
When they all go away,
The R.F.A.”

Such were the absurd “poems” that interested me at this time !

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By the end of the war a Y.M.C.A. canteen was opened in our village for the troops. I gradually did away with my recreation club, and as at that time we had no more officers billeted on us, we had convalescent ones regaining their health in our home, which was in an extremely healthy resort.

I frequently went to London, where my husband was working as Director of the Ministry of Information. By that time his play "The Title" was being produced, and as he was not able to attend the rehearsals to help with the staging, I did so for him. It was most interesting, and it gave me a chance to prove that I understood my husband's work and the art of the theatre.

I also attended War Committees and did canteen work. We experienced many air-raids, especially in September, 1919. On one occasion, when John Galsworthy and his

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wife were dining with us, we were obliged to spend the evening in the cellar.

Towards the end of the war, I offered my services to the Anglo-French Society which was doing propaganda work. It was through that society that I had at last the chance to start giving lectures and recitals from the works of our French poets. The work I loved best had come to me at last. For the last seven years I have lost no opportunity of giving a poetry recital. Soon after the war I made a tour in Scotland, reciting chiefly the works of Charles Baudelaire. My husband went to the station with me on that occasion. It was extremely cold. We both had thick coats and looked the picture of health and happiness. My train was late in starting. I expressed the pleasure I felt at the mere thought of reciting Baudelaire's poems. My husband, who is among my admirers, said, "Do you realise that you have undertaken to do the

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most astounding thing ? It requires nerve ! Not even Baudelaire could have foreseen that his poems would be recited in Scotland ! " The remark stimulated me. It helped me in my work. Baudelaire was influenced by Edgar Allan Poe ; his work is beautiful, morbid and daring ; he was a sensuous man, loving luxury and artificiality, and it was true that the Scot might not have appreciated him.

Critics have said that if I had been on the stage I should have become a great actress, for I have dramatic instinct and technique. To my mind there is nothing less certain. One can be an original interpreter of poetry and yet be a very bad actress. Stage work and plays I have always loved. I am supposed to be a rather good critic of anything to do with the stage. I love all the arts. I also love the country, flowers and animals, and I cherish the thought of retiring, when old and tired of cities, to a country house surrounded by

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beautiful scenery, and not too far from a village, whose church bells I shall hear at regular times, and whose inhabitants I shall know and love.

Up to the present my life has been very interesting. At times I find it thrilling, for I love to study human nature and to enjoy all that life offers—like my famous husband, Arnold Bennett.